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Impaired vision helps students to experience playing sports with a disability

Sport Coaching students from Northumbria University have worked with footballers with visual impairments to better understand the needs of sports people with disabilities.

Lecturers from the University's Department of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation organised guest sessions from expert speakers and coaches who work with people with disabilities to provide students with opportunities to understand the different environments and coaching methods required. The students were also blindfolded themselves before taking part in a football training session to gain first-hand experiences of the challenges that people with visual impairments face.

The guest speakers included Reggie Dornan and Paul Matheson, who both have links with Newcastle United. Paul plays for the NUFC Blind team, while Reggie holds UEFA and IFA coaching awards. Alongside his role at Newcastle United, Reggie is Head Coach for the Ireland National Deaf Team and has coached in the Deaflympics.

Paul and Reggie outlined the key considerations that students need to be aware of when coaching blind players, before inviting the students to take part in a game themselves, in which they were blindfolded to experience visual impairment to better understand the needs of supporting blind players.

The students also had a guest lecturer to support the practical applications required when working with the visually impaired. Aly Turner from Action for Blind People, gave the students an opportunity to try SimSpecs – specialist glasses used to simulate different visual impairments, which provides the

students with understanding of the needs of athletes with differing visual issues.

David Hooper, who lectures in Sport Development, said: “The idea behind this was to educate students on what blind sports players can do but also to make them aware of the capabilities of disabled players. The sessions provided something of a culture shock to students and required them to consider very particular aspects of coaching that would normally not be considered, which they found to be very beneficial.

One of the participants, Adam Nichol, said: “The session from Reggie Dornan of Newcastle United, on coaching in a visual impairment disability context was an excellent learning opportunity for us as a cohort of coaches, it demonstrated their coaching behaviours and actions and how these were effective in the context of disability sport.

“For me personally, it was a great opportunity to reflect upon my personal coaching practice and philosophy. It helped me to consider how I would integrate different coaching behaviours when working with visually impaired athletes, specifically to enhance their engagement, understanding and motivation.”

Liam Cumiskey, who also took part in the session, praised how useful it was for his personal development, adding: “The workshop really helped to enhance my knowledge of coaching blind football. The workshop was fun and educational and will help me become a better coach that can provide high quality inclusive sessions.

Northumbria has been delivering Sport degrees for over 30 years and is one of the original providers in UK Higher Education.

For more information about studying Sport Coaching at Northumbria University please visit - www.northumbria.ac.uk/sportcoaching

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